United Nations A/57/375

General Assembly

Distr.: General
3 September 2002

Original: English

Fifty-seventh session
Item 22 (h) of the provisional agenda*
Cooperation between the United Nations and regional and other organizations: cooperation between the United Nations and the Inter-Parliamentary Union

Cooperation between the United Nations and the Inter-Parliamentary Union

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

The General Assembly, on 7 December 2001, adopted resolution 56/46, in which it requested the Secretary-General to report to it at its fifty-seventh session on various aspects of cooperation between the United Nations and the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

The present report is submitted pursuant to that resolution and details the growing cooperation between the two organizations in bringing a parliamentary dimension to the work of the United Nations, including the areas of peace and security, economic and social development, international law and human rights, democracy and gender issues.

* A/57/150.

** Owing to important recent events related to the agenda item, the report could not be submitted at an earlier date.

02-57735 (E) 171002

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 56/46 of 7 December 2001, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report it at its fifty-seventh session on the various aspects of cooperation between the United Nations and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (UPU).

2. The report details the growing cooperation between the two organizations in bringing a parliamentary dimension to the work of the United Nations, including in the areas of peace and security, economic and social development, international law and human rights, democracy and gender issues.

II. Contribution of parliaments to major United Nations events

A. Parliamentary contribution to multilateral negotiations

3. In a resolution on the role of parliaments in developing public policies in an era of globalization, multilateral institutions and international trade agreements, the 107th IPU Conference, held in Marrakech, Morocco, in March 2002 followed up on the United Nations Millennium Declaration. The Declaration had called for strengthened cooperation between the United Nations and national parliaments, through IPU. The Conference underlined the need to include parliamentarians in delegations to multilateral negotiations, to see to it that such delegations comprise both men and women and to ensure that parliaments play an active role in monitoring decisions and activities of multilateral institutions.

B. Special session of the General Assembly on children

4. The Inter-Parliamentary Union and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) convened the Parliamentary Forum on Children to help to mobilize parliaments on children's issues and seek legislative strategies to promote the well-being of children, with a particular focus on measures to protect children's rights and on the budgetary resources required to implement the goals of the special session. Some 250 parliamentarians from 75 countries attended the Forum and were also able to follow the discussions at the special session.

5. The Forum made recommendations for follow-up action by parliaments and IPU, which were subsequently presented to the special session of the General Assembly and which form the basis for strengthened future cooperation between UNICEF and IPU.

C. World Summit on Sustainable Development

6. The Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Parliament of South Africa organized a parliamentary meeting on 29 and 30 August 2002 in Johannesburg, South Africa on the occasion of the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Over 300 members of parliament from more than 50 countries attended the meeting to debate issues directly relevant to the role of parliaments in ensuring implementation and accountability. Particular attention was paid to the immediate follow-up of the Summit, focusing on such issues as compliance with reporting requirements, sustainable development — the basis of human security, improving the international framework for sustainable development and New Partnership for Africa's Development, and other new forms of partnerships for development. At the end of their deliberations, the participants adopted a final declaration that was subsequently transmitted to the World Summit.

7. The meeting was preceded by a series of activities aimed at informing parliaments of the preparations made for the Summit and to mobilize their participation. To this end, an IPU delegation was accredited to the Fourth Preparatory Committee meeting held in Bali in June 2002. In its statement before the ministers, the IPU delegation expressed concern about the slow progress of negotiations and reminded delegates that parliaments were crucial to the implementation of policy measures.

D. World Food Summit: five years later

8. As an official parallel event of the Summit, IPU and the Italian Parliament held a one-day meeting on 11 June 2002. The meeting, held at the Italian Parliament, attracted considerable attention and was

attended by close to 200 members of parliament from over 80 countries, most of whom were present at the Summit as part of their national delegations.

9. Participants exchanged views on parliamentary strategies for effective follow-up to the decisions taken at the Summit, in particular, through the adoption of appropriate legislation and the mobilization of adequate financial resources. The report of the parliamentary meeting and the text of a message to the Summit from the 107th session of the IPU conference meeting in Marrakech were officially presented at the Summit's closing plenary session by the Speaker of the Italian Chamber of Deputies.

10. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to food participated in the meeting, serving with IPU on a panel to examine the right to food. The Special Rapporteur and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) are also cooperating with the IPU in the production of a handbook for parliamentarians on the right to food to support the global struggle against hunger.

E. United Nations Commission on Human Rights

11. On 8 April 2002, some 30 parliamentarians from 12 countries participated in Geneva in the first ever IPU parliamentary meeting on the occasion of a session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. The initiative, which received full support from OHCHR, took place in response to a need expressed by parliamentarians to learn from key United Nations officials and experts about human rights standards and mechanisms at the time when the Commission on Human Rights was discussing them. Apart from familiarizing participants with the structure and agenda of the Commission, the meeting focused on strengthening partnerships between parliamentarians, United Nations mechanisms and staff, as well as civil society, in the promotion of human rights.

F. Parliamentary hearing at the United Nations

12. In close cooperation with the United Nations Secretariat, IPU convened on 4 December 2001 the annual meeting between parliamentarians attending the meetings of the General Assembly and senior United Nations representatives. The Secretary-General and the Assistant Secretary-General for External Relations welcomed the participants, who then held an exchange of views with the Chairman of the Counter-Terrorism Committee of the Security Council, the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, the Assistant Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs and the Assistant Secretary-General in the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. This annual event provides an excellent opportunity for members of parliament and senior United Nations officials to engage in an open dialogue on the major issues of the day.

III. Peace and security

A. Security and cooperation in the Mediterranean

13. Despite the background of negative developments in the Middle East, IPU was able to pursue its Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean process, which complements the work of the United Nations General Assembly to promote security and cooperation in the region. The process involves all parliaments of those States bordering the Mediterranean, plus Jordan and Portugal and, as associate participants, three categories of parties, namely (a) Palestine, (b) the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America and (c) the European Parliament and the inter-parliamentary organizations concerned. The Mediterranean Women Parliamentarians' Task Force contributes to the process.

14. In March 2002, the parties to the Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean process adopted, at the initiative of Malta, an instrument on the establishment, in the long term, of a Parliamentary Assembly of Mediterranean States. They recognized, however, that politically speaking, the time was not ripe to envisage the early establishment of such an assembly, in view of the situation in the Middle East, and agreed that discussions on prospects for establishing an assembly on the basis of the instrument should continue in the future.

B. Middle East question

15. The Inter-Parliamentary Union continued to address the situation in the Middle East at its 106th and 107th Conferences. In the light of the tragic events in the region, and of various United Nations resolutions and peace initiatives, the IPU membership issued resolutions calling for the resumption of negotiations to achieve a comprehensive and lasting peace by ending the Israeli occupation, establishing an independent Palestinian State with its capital in Jerusalem and solving the Palestinian refugee question equitably. The membership also called upon Israelis and Palestinians to support the ongoing bilateral and multilateral peace missions, including those of the United Nations.

16. Through its Committee on Middle East Questions IPU brings together representatives of the Knesset, the Palestinian Legislative Council and the Palestine National Council, as well as parliamentarians from the region, to broaden the dialogue in the search for peace. Efforts continue to bring together the Speakers of the Knesset and the Palestinian Legislative Council, under IPU auspices, in Geneva.

C. Cyprus

17. The Inter-Parliamentary Union remains supportive of United Nations efforts to find an acceptable political solution to the Cyprus question. The dialogue between political leaders on both sides, re-launched at the 107th Conference, was encouraged by the fact that a new round of talks between the two leaders, Glafkos Clerides and Rauf Denktash, had at the time resumed under the auspices of the United Nations Secretary-General.

D. Terrorism

18. On 11 September 2001, the 106th IPU Conference, meeting in Ouagadougou, condemned with the utmost energy the terrorist attacks perpetrated against the United States of America. It also prepared a resolution in which the participants unanimously invited all States to work with the United States of America to expose and punish the perpetrators of the terrorists acts and their accomplices, in accordance with international law, and to strengthen their cooperation with a view to preventing and stamping out terrorist activities throughout the world.

19. At the December 2001 United Nations/IPU Day, which was held in New York, the Chairman of the Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee briefed members of parliament on current efforts by the United Nations to combat terrorism. He also circulated an information document to assist delegates at the 107th IPU Conference with their negotiation of a resolution on terrorism. The document was entitled "Terrorism — a threat to democracy, human rights and civil society: the contribution of parliaments to combating international terrorism and addressing its causes in order to maintain international peace and security". In the resolution, inter alia, parliaments are urged to approve or to facilitate approval of relevant United Nations conventions on terrorism and to ensure that appropriate action is taken at national and international levels to combat terrorism.

E. Drug trafficking and transnational organized crime

20. Cooperation between IPU and the United Nations Office at Vienna aims primarily to promote awareness among members of parliament of the full dimension of drug trafficking and transnational organized crime, and to encourage them to take appropriate action in support of the United Nations efforts in this field. In this context, the Executive Director of the Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention of the United Nations Secretariat and the Secretary-General of IPU sent out a joint appeal in November 2001 to the Speakers of national parliaments urging them to take steps towards the early ratification, entry into force and subsequent enforcement of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols thereto. The two organizations are also working together to provide support to those countries which require it in the context of the ratification and implementation of the Convention.

IV. Economic and social development

A. Financing for development

21. This issue was central to the work of the United Nations in the year under review and culminated at the March 2002 IPU Conference, which issued the blueprint for action known as the Monterrey Consensus. As an organization accredited to the

Monterrey process, IPU worked to generate awareness of it among its members and stimulate parliamentary input to the Monterrey Conference. The IPU Committee on Sustainable Development issued a background document on financing for development for the attention of parliaments. IPU also participated in a Parliamentary Forum organized by the Mexican Congress during the Monterrey Conference, in order to bring a parliamentary dimension to that event.

22. A special session of the IPU Governing Council met in Geneva in September 2002 to discuss a parliamentary report on financing for development and to issue recommendations for follow-up by parliaments to the Monterrey Conference.

B. Sustainable development

23. Marking the tenth anniversary of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992, IPU adopted a wide-ranging resolution at its 107th Conference providing a parliamentary position on key environmental issues. The centrepiece of the resolution was climate change. IPU urged parliaments to work towards the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, so that it would enter into force in time for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, as called for by the Secretary-General.

C. Desertification

24. The Inter-Parliamentary Union furthered its cooperation with the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and sponsored the fourth Round Table of Parliamentarians in Geneva on 4 and 5 October 2001, on the occasion of the fifth Conference of the Parties to the Convention.

25. At that meeting, legislators from countries affected by desertification, invited by the United Nations through IPU, gave their views on the implementation of this international instrument. At the end of the Round Table, they approved a declaration on the role of members of parliament in addressing the linkages between poverty and sustainable development, particularly desertification, within the framework of the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. The subsequent Conference of the Parties took note of the declaration and included it in its report.

D. Trade and development

26. As part of its efforts to provide a parliamentary dimension on trade and development, IPU has worked to make parliamentary participation in the activities of the World Trade Organization at once more visible and meaningful. In so doing, IPU followed the recommendations of the first global parliamentary meeting on international trade, held in conjunction with WTO in Geneva in June 2001, which called upon IPU to ensure active parliamentary involvement in efforts to promote free and fair trade and enhance the rules-based world trading regime with WTO at its centre.

27. On 11 November 2001 IPU and the European Parliament held a parliamentary meeting on the occasion of the Fourth WTO Ministerial Conference, held in Doha, to discuss parliamentary participation in the work of WTO. The presence in Doha of an unprecedented number of legislators and the attribution to IPU of the status of observer at WTO Ministerial Conferences show tangible progress made in bringing parliaments closer to WTO and in intensifying their activities in overseeing and influencing government policy in relation to trade negotiations.

28. Building on the success of the parliamentary meetings in Geneva and Doha, IPU, together with the European Parliament, has embarked on the preparation of the next parliamentary forum on international trade, to be held in 2003. The preparatory process involves national parliaments, regional parliamentary assemblies, and other organizations, and is carried out in close cooperation with WTO.

E. Child labour

29. As part of a strengthened partnership with the International Labour Organization (ILO) under their 1999 agreement, IPU and ILO jointly produced a handbook for parliamentarians, entitled "Eradicating the worst forms of child labour: a practical guide for the implementation of ILO Convention No. 182".

30. The handbook, released in March 2002, is designed to be a practical tool for the promotion of accession to ILO Convention No. 182 and the adoption of legislation, policies, programmes and budgets

consistent with its provisions. It provides examples of best practices and presents to parliamentarians the different kinds of action they can take to contribute to eradicating the various forms of abuse to which child workers are exposed.

31. On the occasion of its launch at the 107th IPU Conference, a panel discussion was organized in cooperation with the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour of ILO and the Moroccan Parliament. UNICEF was also associated with the event.

F. Education, culture and science

32. The Director-General of UNESCO gave the keynote address at the 107th IPU Conference on the theme of intercultural dialogue. This followed a joint UNESCO-IPU round table, convened on 2 November 2001 during the thirty-first session of the UNESCO General Conference, to determine a strategy for the greater involvement of both parliaments and parliamentarians in programme implementation at all levels. During the General Conference, IPU also took part in a panel on multi-stakeholder partnerships and global problem solving.

33. Discussions are now in progress to select and implement joint activities relevant to both UNESCO and IPU, particularly in meeting the goals of education for all and in the area of culture, as well as in ethical standard setting to guide scientific behaviour and social change.

V. International law and human rights

A. Human rights

34. The Inter-Parliamentary Union has been working with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on various activities in the framework of the OHCHR Programme of Technical Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights, which aims at building and strengthening national capacities and structures having an impact on the observance of human rights and the maintenance of the rule of law.

35. In August 2000, OHCHR and IPU jointly organized the Subregional North-east Asia Workshop entitled "Parliaments and human rights", which was held in Ulaanbaatar (Mongolia). During the workshop, which brought together parliamentarians from China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Republic of Korea, Japan and Mongolia, the following themes were among those addressed: human rights and legislation; parliaments and human rights treaties; human rights in the structures of parliament; parliaments and national human rights planning; and parliamentary oversight and human rights.

36. OHCHR and IPU are also developing a handbook on human rights and parliaments, which will constitute a practical information and education tool for parliamentarians to assist them in performing their important role in the promotion and protection of human rights.

B. International humanitarian law

37. The Inter-Parliamentary Union also continues to pursue its efforts to raise parliamentary awareness and action in the field of international humanitarian law and related issues. In that context, it concluded the world survey it had launched jointly with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in October 2000 and urged both ICRC and the United Nations to respond to requests from parliaments for technical assistance in that field.

38. The Inter-Parliamentary Union also organized, with the African Parliamentary Union and ICRC, and with the support of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) a first African Conference on international humanitarian law for the protection of civilians during armed conflict in Africa. Held in Niamey from 18 to 20 February 2002, the Conference adopted a declaration, which contains a comprehensive plan of action to secure respect for international humanitarian law and refugee protection in Africa.

C. Refugee law

39. Over the past few years, IPU has developed close working ties with UNHCR in the promotion of respect for and protection of refugees. At the 168th session of the Inter-Parliamentary Council, held in April 2001, IPU adopted a resolution on the fiftieth anniversary of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees

and its 1967 Protocol. The resolution attested to IPU support of the Convention, which is the cornerstone of the refugee protection regime. IPU and UNHCR also jointly produced a handbook for parliamentarians entitled *Refugee protection: a guide to international refugee law*.

40. The handbook was presented on 12 December 2001 at the Ministerial Conference of States Parties to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and/or its 1967 Protocol, in Geneva. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the President of the Council of IPU, Dr. Najma Heptulla, subsequently launched the publication during the 107th IPU Conference held in Marrakech in March 2002. A hearing of the High Commissioner was also held on that occasion. The hearing elicited a lively exchange of views with parliamentarians on the plight of refugees, especially women and children, and on the main challenges and financial constraints facing the High Commissioner's Office and the international community. A workshop entitled "Protecting refugee rights in East Africa: the need for a progressive legislative and policy framework", attended by 20 parliamentarians from Kenya, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania, was subsequently held in Mombassa in April 2002, and also served to draw attention to the newly launched handbook.

VI. Democracy and gender issues

A. Technical support to parliaments, including in peacekeeping and peace-building operations

41. The Inter-Parliamentary Union continues to provide extensive support to the United Nations in its efforts to contribute to the promotion of good governance and democracy worldwide. The IPU provided advice, information and other substantive input for the preparation of the *Human Development Report 2002: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. In keeping with long-standing practice, it also contributed substantially with statistical data on women in parliament.

42. The Inter-Parliamentary Union also strengthened its partnership with UNDP under their joint Parliamentary Support Programme, which is now in its third operational year. It will be recalled that this agreement covers a period of three years, with funding of $1.5 million intended, among other things, to strengthen the capacities of national parliamentary institutions, as well as promote gender partnership in all aspects of political life.

43. The Inter-Parliamentary Union is currently implementing and/or supervising, with funding from UNDP, projects in Albania, Cambodia, Gabon, Rwanda, Timor-Leste and Uruguay. It is also providing support to UNDP with a view to designing and implementing a project to strengthen the oversight role of the Parliament of Viet Nam.

44. The Inter-Parliamentary Union is also increasingly working with the World Bank Institute in undertaking training activities for parliaments and preparing related studies and manuals.

45. Discussions with the Economic Commission for Africa have been pursued with a view to designing a core programme for the strengthening of parliaments.

B. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Optional Protocol thereto

46. Over the past few years, IPU has consistently worked in close cooperation with the Division for the Advancement of Women of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat to promote the Convention and more recently its Optional Protocol. The Division and IPU have collaborated to produce a handbook for parliamentarians on the Convention and its Optional Protocol, which is scheduled to be launched later in 2002.

47. In its ongoing efforts to mobilize the parliaments of those States that are due to submit their national periodic report to the Committee on Elimination of Discrimination against Women, IPU has continued its practice of sending out letters encouraging the parliaments of the countries concerned to make sure that the national reports are submitted on time and with all requisite data, and that parliament is involved in discussing its contents as well as the ensuing recommendations of the Committee. Since 2001, the Committee has appointed an IPU focal point from among its members.

C. Gender-sensitive national budgets

48. The Inter-Parliamentary Union continued organizing regional seminars for parliaments on their role in the budget process, including from the gender perspective. The most recent seminars were held in Bamako in November and December 2001 for Francophone African parliaments and in Manila in July 2002 for parliaments in the "Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) plus Three" grouping. Based on the debates and outcome of the seminars, which are to be continued in other parts of the world, initial work has begun on the production of a parliamentary handbook on the subject.

D. Female genital mutilation

49. The Inter-Parliamentary Union pursued its work to combat violence against women by launching a parliamentary campaign for the eradication of female genital mutilation. It organized a panel discussion on the subject during the 106th IPU Conference, with the aim of raising awareness of parliamentarians regarding the nature and impact of these practices and of compiling data, especially on national laws aimed at eradicating them. More than 80 of these laws are now presented on the IPU web site (http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/fgm.htm), together with other background information and links to all relevant United Nations agencies and programmes.

E. Statistical data on women in politics

50. The Inter-Parliamentary Union continued its activities relating to the collection and production of the latest statistical data concerning women's participation in politics. On the occasion of International Women's Day, IPU issued up-to-date statistical information on women's progress and setbacks in parliaments, which was made available to the session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

F. Volunteering

51. The Inter-Parliamentary Union lent its support to the organization of events arranged by the United Nations Volunteers and the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. The first of these initiatives was held on 11 April 2002, during the World Conference on Ageing held in Madrid, and consisted of a panel entitled "Older people as volunteers". Two other similar initiatives were subsequently organized during the Fourteenth International AIDS Conference, held in Barcelona, Spain, in July 2002, and the World Conference on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg, South Africa, in August 2002.

52. The Inter-Parliamentary Union encourages parliaments to view the issue from the perspective of democracy and good governance and to hold consultations with major organizations concerned with volunteering in their countries, including through parliamentary hearings, with a view to identifying policies which encourage volunteering and to establish a legislative framework supportive of voluntary action.

VII. Secretariat arrangements

53. The Liaison Office of IPU in New York continues to be instrumental in the implementation of activities carried out between the secretariats of the two organizations.

54. In anticipation of the inauguration of the new Headquarters of IPU in Geneva, the United Nations Postal Administration has cooperated with the IPU secretariat in the production and launch of a commemorative stamp, which will be issued to coincide with the auspicious occasion.

VIII. Conclusion

55. **The Secretary-General welcomes the growing cooperation between the United Nations and the Inter-Parliamentary Union and hopes that current discussions on the status of IPU in the General Assembly, as per his report dated 26 June 2001 (A/55/996), will bear fruit during the current session.**